

Strategic Goal 4

VA will support the public health of the Nation as a whole through medical research and medical education and training, and by serving as a resource in the event of a national emergency or natural disaster. VA will support the socioeconomic well-being of the Nation through the provision of education, vocational rehabilitation, and home loan programs. VA will also preserve the memory and sense of patriotism of the Nation by maintaining our national cemeteries as national shrines and hosting patriotic and commemorative ceremonies and events.

The following table identifies estimates of the total resources devoted to this strategic goal and its associated objectives.

		FY 2003 Obligations (\$ in Millions)	% of Total VA Resources
Strategic Goal 4 Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being, and history of the Nation.		\$997	1.5%
Objectives	Performance Measures		
4.1 Improve the Nation's preparedness for response to war, terrorism, national emergencies, and natural disasters by developing plans and taking actions to ensure continued service to veterans as well as support to national, state, and local emergency management and homeland security efforts.	No Key Measure	<\$1M	<0.1%
4.2 Advance VA medical research and development programs that address veterans' needs, with an emphasis on service-connected injuries and illnesses, and contribute to the Nation's knowledge of disease and disability.	• Percent of research projects devoted to the Designated Research Areas.	\$463	0.7%
4.3 Sustain partnerships with the academic community that enhance the quality of care to veterans and provide high quality educational experiences for health care trainees.	No Key Measure	\$454	0.7%
4.4 Enhance the socioeconomic well-being of veterans, and thereby the Nation and local communities, through veteran's benefits; assistance programs for small, disadvantaged, and veteran-owned businesses; and other community initiatives.	No Key Measure	<\$1M	<0.1%
4.5 Ensure that national cemeteries are maintained as shrines dedicated to preserving our Nation's history, nurturing patriotism, and honoring the service and sacrifice veterans have made.	• Percent of respondents who rate national cemetery appearance as excellent.	\$80	0.1%

Objective 4.1

Improve the Nation's preparedness for response to war, terrorism, national emergencies, and natural disasters by developing plans and taking actions to ensure continued service to veterans as well as support to national, state, and local emergency management and homeland security efforts.

During 2003, VA continued to strengthen its emergency management infrastructure by consolidating Departmental emergency preparedness oversight, emphasizing exercising and training of "successors" and improving infrastructure.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs consolidated the Department's emergency preparedness and security and law enforcement oversight within the office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy and Planning. The restructured office was designated as the Office of Policy, Planning, and Preparedness. Organizationally, the emergency preparedness functions fall under the director of Operations and Readiness and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Security and Law Enforcement.

During 2003, VA completed the following emergency management activities:

- Participated in both internal and inter-departmental exercises.
- Continued to train decontamination teams.
- Conducted regular training for officials in the line of succession.
- Continued twice-weekly meetings of the Crisis Response Team to monitor, evaluate, and respond to events not requiring activation of VA's Continuity of Operations plan.
- Developed individual contingency plans for several events at possible risk for terrorist attack or other dis-

ruption (e.g., July 4th, and anniversary of September 11th terrorist attack).

- Enhanced communications and made structural modifications to alternate operations sites.
- Procured 122 out of a planned 143 pharmaceutical caches for VA medical centers to enable continued care for VA patients and staff if supply is disrupted.

VA works in cooperation with numerous federal agencies to further this objective. Senior leadership participates in Homeland Security and Deputies Council meetings. VA also serves on policy coordinating committees and work groups of the Department of Homeland Security, and on work groups with the Departments of Health and Human Services, Justice, Defense, Energy, and Agriculture to establish governmental policy regarding response and recovery, training and exercises, research and development, and medical and public health preparedness.

The Department is participating in the interdepartmental effort to develop a new National Response Plan and National Incident Management System in response to Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5.

Central Office officials and a number of the Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) participated in the nationwide exercise TOPOFF 2, a major biennial exercise mandated by

Congress and designed to provide training in the event of an attack with weapons of mass destruction.

There are currently no key performance measures associated with this objective.

Objective 4.2

Advance VA medical research and development programs that address veterans' needs, with an emphasis on service-connected injuries and illnesses, and contribute to the Nation's knowledge of disease and disability.

Performance Goal

Maintain the percent of research projects devoted to the Designated Research Areas at 99 percent.

In 2003, the Research and Development Program accomplished its goal of ensuring that VA research is dedicated to meeting the special needs of the veteran population by achieving the goal of 99 percent. VA conducts medical research that leads to demonstrable improvements in the lives of veterans, their families, and the general public. VA has established designated research areas in which VA-sponsored research will be conducted. These areas include: Aging, Chronic Disease, Mental Illness, Substance Abuse, Sensory Loss, Trauma-Related Illness, Health Systems, Special Populations, and Military Occupations and Environmental

Exposure. VA's Office of Research Compliance and Assurance advises the Under Secretary for Health on matters affecting the integrity of research protections, promotes the ethical conduct of research, and investigates allegations of research impropriety. VHA will continuously promote excellence and innovation in the education of future health care professionals. Achievement of this performance goal is partly contingent on the cooperation of other government and non-government agencies that partner with VA on some research projects. Much of the research conducted in VA facilities is subject to the regulations of other federal agencies in addition to

VA's own regulations. VA works closely with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Department of Health and Human Services on joint studies funded by NIH. Similarly, VA works closely with the Food and Drug Administration on human studies funded by pharmaceutical companies in support of a new drug or device application.

Performance measures to support this objective are currently under development. This measure will not be a key measure in future years.

Objective 4.3

Sustain partnerships with the academic community that enhance the quality of care to veterans and provide high quality educational experiences for health care trainees.

VA conducts an education and training program for health profession students and residents to enhance the quality of care provided to veteran patients within the VHA healthcare system. Education and training efforts are accomplished through coordinated programs and activities in partnership with affiliated academic institutions. VA's graduate medical education is conducted through affiliations with university schools of medicine. Each year, over 76,000 students from all health profession fields receive some or all of their clinical training in VHA facilities

through affiliations with over 1,200 educational institutions. Currently, 130 VHA medical facilities are affiliated with 107 of the Nation's 126 medical schools. Through these partnerships, almost 28,000 medical residents and 16,000 medical students receive some of their training in VA every year. VA supports 8,800 physician resident positions in almost 2,000 ACGME-accredited university programs. Historically, VA has also been a leader in the training of associated health professionals. Through affiliations with individual health profession schools and colleges,

clinical traineeships and fellowships are provided to students in more than 40 professions including nurses, pharmacists, dentists, audiologists, dietitians, social workers, psychologists, physical therapists, optometrists, nuclear medicine technologists, physician assistants, respiratory therapists, and nurse practitioners. Approximately 32,000 allied health profession students receive training in VA facilities each year.

There are currently no key performance measures associated with this objective.

Objective 4.4

Enhance the socioeconomic well-being of veterans, and thereby the Nation and local communities, through veteran's benefits; assistance programs for small, disadvantaged, and veteran-owned businesses; and other community initiatives.

Our nation has an obligation to provide servicemembers and veterans with the means to take advantage of the opportunities protected and preserved by their service. In June 2002, the VA Procurement Executive and the Director of the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization established the Veteran-Owned and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business Task Force to develop strategies to help VA attain procurement goals in these two important socioeconomic categories. The task force ultimately identified 5 goals and made 16 recommendations with action steps to improve VA's veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned small business accomplishments. The VA Secretary approved the task

force's report in March 2003. Implementation of the recommendations is underway.

VA promotes business ownership through its Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Center for Veterans Enterprise. VA's program evaluation of the educational assistance programs demonstrated a positive return on investment of 2 to 1 in the form of increased income taxes for every program dollar spent.

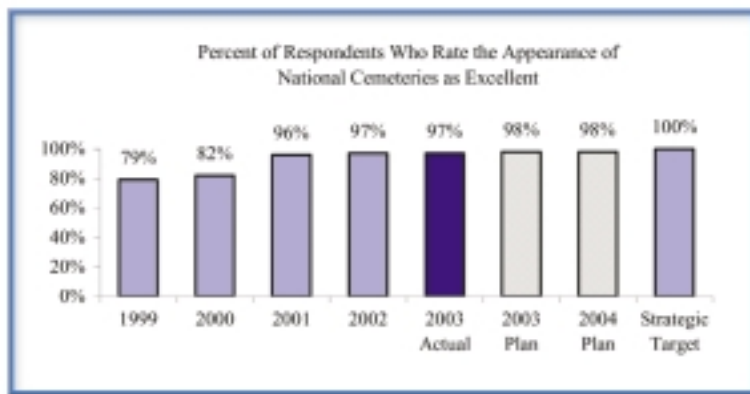
There are currently no key performance measures associated with this objective.

Objective 4.5

Ensure that national cemeteries are maintained as shrines dedicated to preserving our Nation's history, nurturing patriotism, and honoring the service and sacrifice veterans have made.

Performance Goal

Increase the percent of respondents who rate national cemetery appearance as excellent to 98 percent in 2003.



The percent of respondents rating cemetery appearance as excellent remained at the same high level as in 2002 at 97 percent, although we did not meet the 2003 goal by 1 percent. Cemetery appearance goals are set high in keeping with the expectations of the families of those who are interred and other visitors.

To ensure the appearance of national cemeteries meets the standards our Nation expects of its national shrines, VA performs a wide variety of grounds management functions. Over time, extremes in weather, such as excessive rain or drought, can result in or exacerbate sunken graves or markers, soiled markers, inferior turf cover, and weathering of columbaria. In 2003, work was done to raise, realign, and clean headstones and markers to ensure uniform height and spacing, and to correct ground sinkage around gravesites.

National Shrine Commitment projects were initiated at the Baltimore, Crown Hill, Dayton, Golden Gate, Long Island, Marion, New Albany, Puerto Rico, Santa Fe, Willamette, and Wood National Cemeteries. These projects will raise, realign, and clean over 80,000 headstones and markers and renovate gravesites in more than 107 acres. While attending to these highly visible aspects of our national shrines, VA also maintained roads, drives, parking lots, and walks; painted buildings, fences, and gates; and repaired roofs, walls, and irrigation and electrical systems.

In 2003, VA established standards and measures for key operational processes including interments, grounds maintenance, and headstones and markers. In conjunction with these standards, NCA initiated an Organizational Assessment and Improvement Program to identify

and prioritize continuous improvement opportunities, and to enhance program accountability by providing managers and staff at all levels with one NCA "scorecard." In 2004, assessment teams will begin to conduct site visits to all national cemeteries. All national cemeteries will be visited on a rotating basis to validate performance reporting.

VA continued its partnerships with various VA and civic organizations that provide volunteers and other participants to assist in maintaining the appearance of national cemeteries. An interagency agreement with the Bureau of Prisons provides for the use of selected prisoners to perform work at national cemeteries. This agreement provides a supplemental source of labor to assist in maintaining the national cemeteries.